Fulfilling the complementary goals of the NW Forest Plan and National Fire Plan

Since 1995, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Medford District Forest Management Program has focused on meeting the dual goals of the Northwest Forest Plan: maintaining and enhancing forest health, and providing a sustainable supply of timber to local communities. The National Fire Plan was established in 2000, adding emphasis to an already important component of the BLM's forest management efforts: reducing fire hazards.

President George W. Bush recently traveled to Medford, Oregon, to unveil his "Healthy Forests and Stronger Communities Initiative" - an initiative that embraces the goals of both the Northwest Forest Plan and the National Fire Plan. President Bush visited the Squires Fire in the Applegate Valley to see first-hand the difference that forest management has on protecting communities and enhancing forest health.

Northwest Forest Plan

The 1995 Northwest Forest Plan provided an ecologically sustainable framework for managing federal lands within the range of the Northern Spotted Owl. The guidance in this plan, coupled with the subsequent Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP), provides the basis for land management decisions on the nearly 900,000 acres managed by the Medford District. Under the Northwest Forest Plan, the Medford District has protected special status species and forest ecosystems while providing a sustainable supply of timber to local communities.

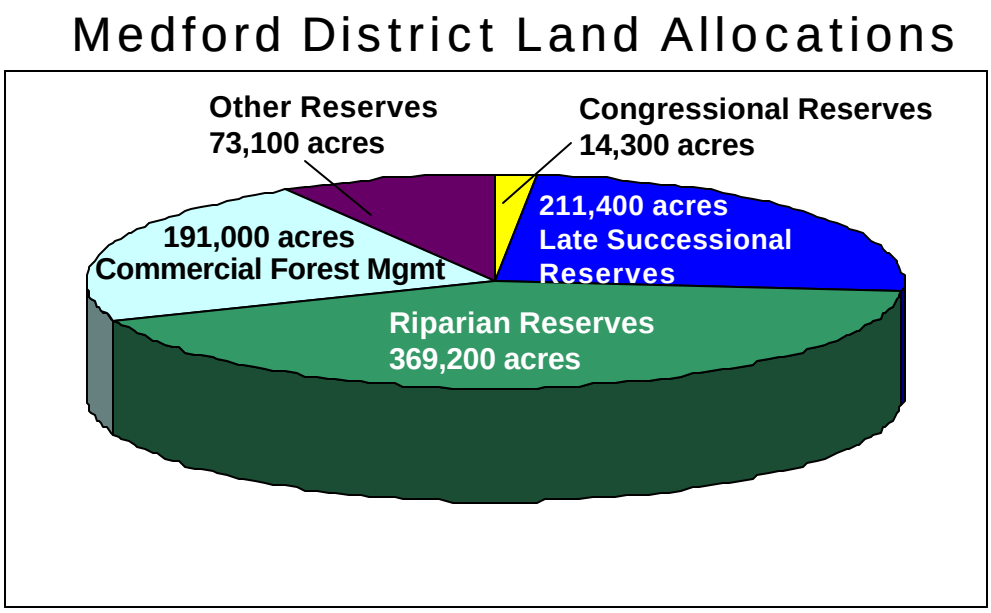
National Fire Plan

The National Fire Plan identified 26 communities at risk in southwest Oregon and more than 26,000 homes intermixed with heavy, fire-prone vegetation. Thanks to an established program of aggressively reducing fire hazard across the landscape, the Medford BLM has already begun fuel treatments in or adjacent to 23 of these communities. Noncommercial fuel treatments have grown from 1,200 acres per year in 1996 to 23,000 acres planned for 2002. In addition, some commercial treatments, primarily thinnings, accomplish fuel hazard reduction objectives on 5,000 to 8,000 acres to produce approximately 20 to 30 million board feet (mmbf) annually.

The photograph on the left shows an area that was commercially thinned following the guidelines of the Northwest Forest Plan. When the Squires Fire passed through this forest in July 2002, the previous management activities played a critical role in reducing fire activity and allowing firefighters to quickly control the fire.

Ecologically Sound and Economically Feasible Landscape Management Projects

Under the Northwest Forest Plan and the Medford District RMP, land managed by the Medford District was divided into several different land allocations including Riparian Reserves, Late Successional Reserves, and other categories. Under these land allocations, approximately 22 percent of the Medford District landbase is identified for commercial forest management. The Medford District designs projects on a landscape basis, using a variety of tools, including commercial forest management, to improve ecosystem health across thousands of acres. Areas that are available for commercial harvest also help provide a sustainable supply of timber to local communities.



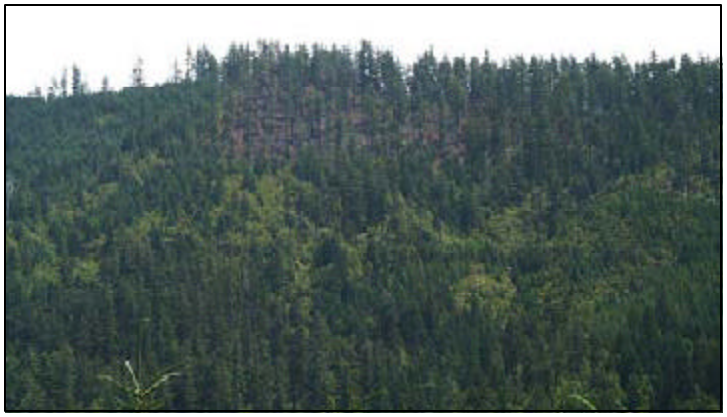
Commercial Forest Management

The Medford District has approximately 191,000 acres of land available for commercial forest management. Under the Northwest Forest Plan, a variety of harvest strategies can be used to meet different objectives. Some of the commercial management options available include commercial thinning, selection cutting, and regeneration harvest. Of the different options, a regeneration harvest typically removes the greatest number of trees per acre. North of Grants Pass, a minimum of 6 to 8 trees per acre must be left during a regeneration harvest. South of Grants Pass, where conditions are drier and trees grow slower, a minimum of 16 to 25 trees per acre must be left. Regeneration harvests are only one of many different silvicultural tools used by the BLM. Since 1995, the Medford District has commercially harvested over 33,000 acres of land. Over 80 percent of these acres have been treated through commercial thinning.

Small Diameter Timber

Restoring forest health and reducing fire hazard is an expensive proposition, as managers are faced with the task of removing the highly flammable understory vegetation while leaving the larger, fire-resilient trees. Not many years ago, agencies would have had to pay timber companies to remove acres of small diameter timber. However, thanks to an increased demand and improved capabilities at saw mills, many timber companies are willing to pay to remove these smaller trees.

In this photograph taken in the Applegate, a project designed to simultaneously restore forest health, reduce fire hazard, and provide a commodity has taken place on the left side of the road, but not on the right side. Forest managers are attempting to imitate the important ecological role that frequent, low-intensity fires once played in southwest Oregon through a sequence of steps that include commercially thinning of the forest understory, piling and burning brush during the winter, and reintroducing fire through underburns in the spring and fall.



The pictures above illustrate a regeneration harvest north of Grants Pass. In this case, 7 to 9 trees per acre were left to provide for species migration and maintenance of ecologically valuable structural components such as down logs, snags, and large trees. The bottom photo shows a panoramic view of the same harvest adjacent to untreated stands.

Upcoming Auction

On September 26, 2002, the Medford District will auction the commercial component of five different forest management projects. The Lower Big Butte, Ferris Bugman, Scattered Apples, and Deer Lake projects were designed as landscape projects to restore forest and watershed health while reducing fire hazard across thousands of acres in the wildland urban interface and providing a sustainable supply of timber. Landscape projects take into account ecosystem restoration goals for forest health, fire hazard reduction, and wildlife and aquatic habitat enhancement. The commercial component of these projects is primarily comprised of commercial thinning, although regeneration harvest is used as well. The Bear Pen project was designed to produce a sustainable supply of timber to local communities and uses regeneration harvest and commercial thinning as the primary management tools.

2002 Projects

Lower Big Butte

The Lower Big Butte project covers approximately 5,200 acres near the community of Butte Falls, much of which is in the wildland-urban interface. Over 3,000 acres will be managed through noncommercial treatments for fire hazard reduction. Other project goals include the promotion of species diversity and mature forest development, restoration of oak woodlands, and a reduction in road density. In addition to the prescribed underburning of conifer and woodland areas, the project will use prescribed fire to improve forage values for wildlife and reduce non-native species on grasslands. The commercial component of this project includes 910 acres and will produce approximately 5 mmbf. Of this, 745 acres are commercial thinning, 135 acres are selection cutting, and 30 acres are regeneration harvest. The average diameter of trees removed through commercial harvest will be 12.9 inches. The Lower Big Butte project will construct 0.3 miles of new road, decommission 5.4 miles of roads, and improve 44 miles of existing roads.

Ferris Bugman

The Ferris Bugman project will take place on approximately 3,700 acres in the Applegate Valley's wildland-urban interface. This project will reduce fire hazard in forested stands by commercially thinning small-diameter trees on approximately 1,850 acres. An additional 1,540 acres of habitat restoration and fire hazard reduction will take place in oak woodlands and shrublands. At this time, 1,255 acres of the project's commercial component will be offered at auction. This includes 1,207 acres of commercial thinning, 27 acres of regeneration cutting, and 21 acres of right-of way clearing, for approximately 5.5 mmbf. The average diameter of trees removed through commercial harvest will be 14.2 inches. Over 500 acres of commercial thinning will be offered at a later sale. New road construction is necessary to access areas for short and long-term management objectives, including the safe reintroduction of prescribed fire. The Ferris Bugman project will construct approximately 6.5 miles of roads and decommission 7.1 miles of existing roads.

Bear Pen

The Bear Pen planning area is located approximately 20 miles northwest of Glendale. This project implements the Northwest Forest Plan by offering a commercial component designed to harvest approximately 6.0 mmbf of timber from 409 acres. Of this, 207 acres are regeneration harvest, 138 acres are commercial thinning, and 64 acres are overstory removal. The average diameter of trees removed through commercial harvest will be 18.1 inches. In addition, the project implements the watershed stability portion of the Northwest Forest Plan through improvement of over 42 miles of roads. The project will decrease road density from 4.4 miles to 3.6 miles of road per square mile. Over 580 acres of fuels hazard reduction treatments, outside the harvest units, are currently under consideration for this area.

Mechanical thinning with the slashbuster.

Burning handpiles.

Scattered Apples

The Scattered Apples project covers approximately 2,600 acres of forested and non-forested land in the wildland-urban interface near the community of Williams. This project will reduce fire hazard as well as enhance meadows, oak woodlands and pine sites that are in decline due to fire exclusion. Approximately 500 acres of pine forest and 500 acres of oak woodland habitat will be enhanced by the removal of competing conifers. Over 1,000 acres will be made available for the harvest of special forest products such as fuelwood, conifer poles and manzanita. Prescribed underburning will take place on 960 acres for habitat enhancement. In addition, a one-mile interpretive trail will be constructed, and approximately four miles of an irrigation ditch will be developed into a trail. The commercial component of the sale involves 516 acres of commercial thinning, 107 acres of selection cutting, and will generate approximately 3.7 mmbf. The average diameter of trees removed through commercial harvest will be 12.6 inches. Road densities in the area will decrease as 6.2 miles of roads will be decommissioned while only 0.1 miles of new road will be constructed.

Deer Lake

The Deer Lake project covers approximately 3,000 acres near the community of Lake Creek. The project will commercially thin over 2,400 acres to reduce fire hazard and restore watershed health, much of which is in the wildland-urban interface. The project will treat over 600 acres of oak woodlands and shrublands for fire hazard reduction and habitat enhancement. The commercial component of this project will also create openings for species such as Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine, reduce individual tree mortality resulting from bark beetles and dwarf mistletoe, and facilitate the progression of old-growth characteristics in forest stands. At this time, 974 acres of the project's commercial component will be offered at auction. This includes 807 acres of commercial thinning, 93 acres of regeneration cut (spread out across the entire project), and 74 acres of selection cutting for approximately 10.2 mmbf. The average diameter of trees removed through commercial harvest will be 13.8 inches. The primary purpose of regeneration harvest in this project is to create openings for ponderosa pine on historic pine sites that have been invaded by Douglas-fir and other species due to fire exclusion. The remaining 1,400 acres of commercial harvest will be offered at a later date. The Deer Lake project will construct 2.2 miles of permanent roads and 1.3 miles of temporary roads. Through active road decommissioning (9 miles), road renovation and improvements (37 miles), and improved stream crossings, the Deer Lake project is projected to reduce long-term sedimentation into local streams by 30 tons annually.

Prescribed underburning.

Road slated for improvement.

GLOSSARY

Commercial Thinning- Selectively harvesting trees from a forest stand, where some trees have commercial value, for the purpose of improving forest health and vigor, stand structure, tree growth and the reduction of fuel ladders that increase the potential of fire damage. Commercial thinnings yield usable wood products while improving the condition and health of the residual stand.

Congressional Reserves- Areas designated by Congress for a special purpose such as national parks, wilderness areas and national monuments.

Forest Management Areas- Federal land declared suitable for the production of wood (outside of reserves and special management areas) that will be available for timber harvest at varying levels through time.

Fuel Treatments- A process by which the accumulation of undesirable levels of fuel are reduced in order to decrease susceptibility to intense fire, improve suppression efforts and provide for safer rural communities and adjacent resources. Fuel treatments are typically accomplished by manual and mechanized treatments including the pruning of low limbs, prescribed underburning, machines that obliterate unwanted fuel (termed slashbuster), prescribed burning and the burning of hand-piled debris.

Late-Successional Reserves- Areas that have been designated for the purpose of preserving, enhancing, or growing late-successional and old-growth forest habitats.

Noncommercial Thinning- The reduction of vegetation including brush, hardwoods and small trees, not considered to have commercial value, for the purpose of reducing fire hazard, improving stand health, and increasing the vigor, resiliency and growth of the remaining vegetation.

Overstory Harvest- The harvesting of trees to improve tree understory tree growth by increasing sunlight and moisture availability to the smaller understory trees.

Regeneration Harvest- The harvesting of trees were the objective is to establish and improve the growth of a new generation of trees.

Riparian Reserves- Designated areas along streams and channels that sometimes flow water where special consideration is given to aquatic organisms and stream side vegetation.

Road Decommissioning- When a road, or segment of a road, is closed to vehicle traffic usually by an earthen barrier or equivalent, with the purpose of encouraging the natural reclamation of the road grade by encroaching vegetation and the elements of nature. Roads may be ripped (or tilled), seeded, mulched, and may be planted to reestablish vegetation. Cross drains, crossing structures and fills in stream channels, and potentially unstable fill areas will be removed to restore natural hydrologic flow.

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Road Upgrade- The improvement of the conditions of an existing road to reduce erosion and the deposition of sediment into adjacent strains. Road upgrades usually involve the addition or improvement of the drainage and surfacing.

Selection Cutting- A method of harvesting involving the removal of select trees for the purpose of improving stand condition, habitat, regeneration potential, or manipulating a desirable species composition.